

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 EB-08 TRSE-00 AID-05 HA-05

MCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11 COME-00

LAB-04 SIL-01 /093 W

-----035679 061329Z /46

R 052122Z MAY 78

FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5620

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 3490

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, SHUM, AR

SUBJECT: RADICAL PARTY MOVING INTO OPPOSITION?

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 3328; (B) BUENOS AIRES 3176

SUMMARY. THE RECENT ARREST OF RADICAL PARTY LEADER BALBIN AND THE HARASSMENT OF RADICAL PARTY MEMBERS BY THE SECURITY FORCES REFLECT GOVERNMENT AWARENESS THAT THE OLD POLITICAL JUICES ARE BEGINNING TO FLOW AGAIN. BALBIN'S STRATEGY REPORTEDLY IS TO PRESSURE THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT TO BEGIN THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL NORMALIZATION. A RADICAL SOURCE CLOSE TO BALBIN APPEARS PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE PROSPECTS FOR GREATER POLITICAL FREEDOM IN THE NEAR FUTURE AND CLAIMS THE PARTY WILL MOVE INTO OPPOSITION AGAINST THE VIDELA GOVERNMENT IF VIDELA DOESN'T SHOW GREATER FLEXIBILITY. MEANWHILE, THERE ARE REPORTS THAT BALBIN WAS TREATED DISCOURTEOUSLY BY POLICE DURING A RECENT INCIDENT IN THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY AND HE IS RESPONDING WITH SOME DEGREE OF DEFIANCE. HE IS ALSO MAINTAINING CONTACT WITH RIVALS OF VIDELA IN THE MILITARY, WHICH MAY BE THE SOURCE

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OF SOME OF HIS PROBLEMS. END SUMMARY

1. NOW THAT THEY HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO DEBRIEF RADICAL PARTY (UCRP) HEAD, DR. RICARDO BALBIN (WHO RETURNED TO BUENOS AIRES MAY 2), OUR UCRP SOURCES HAVE RETREATED SOMEWHAT FROM THEIR EARLIER HYPOTHESIS AS TO WHO IS TO BLAME FOR BALBIN'S EIGHT-AND-A-HALF

HOURLY LONG ARREST IN SAN LUIS PROVINCE. BALBIN PLACES THE BLAME ON THE LOCAL POLICE CHIEF AS WELL AS THE PROVINCIAL GOVERNOR (WHOSE FATHER IS AN OLD POLITICAL ADVERSARY), BUT RADICAL LEADERS CONTINUE ASSERTING TO US THAT THESE AUTHORITIES WOULD NOT HAVE DARED TO TREAT BALBIN SO IGNOMINIOUSLY HAD THEY NOT PREVIOUSLY CONSULTED

HIGHER AUTHORITY IN BUENOS AIRES (READ INTERIOR MINISTER HARGUINDEGUY). THE RADICALS SEE HARGUINDEGUY'S TOUGH LINE AGAINST POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITY AS SETTING THE FRAMEWORK FOR POLICE ACTIONS SUCH AS THE SAN LUIS INCIDENT -- SO THAT IN THEIR EYES HARGUINDEGUY IS THE ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE PARTY. BALBIN HAS BEEN REACTING TESTILY SINCE THIS INCIDENT, MAINTAINING THAT HE AND HIS COMPANIONS MERELY HAD BEEN "KILLING TIME" UNTIL TRAIN-TIME AT A PROVINCIAL HOTEL WHEN THEY WERE WRONGFULLY DETAINED BY AN "AGGRESSIVE POLICE CHIEF."

2. BALBIN APPEARED BEFORE A FEDERAL JUDGE MAY 4 TO MAKE A STATEMENT CONCERNING THE UCRP MEETING WHICH TOOK PLACE IN HIS LAW OFFICE ON APRIL 22, AT WHICH TIME A WRITTEN PARTY CRITIQUE OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC SCENE WAS MADE PUBLIC -- THE INCIDENT WHICH LED TO EX-CONFIDENTIAL

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VICE PRESIDENT PERETTE AND EX FEDERAL DEPUTY TROCCOLI'S BEING CALLED IN FOR QUESTIONING THE FOLLOWING DAY (REFTEL B). HOWEVER, WHEN THE JUDGE BEGAN TO CROSS EXAMINE BALBIN TO DETERMINE WHETHER THAT INCIDENT CONSTITUTED A VIOLATION OF LAW 21,323 (WHICH PROHIBITS POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITIES), BALBIN STOOD ON HIS CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO REFUSE TO TESTIFY AND WITHDREW FROM THE COURTHOUSE.

3. IN THE PAST FEW DAYS THE NEWS MEDIA HAVE BEEN GIVING CONSIDERABLE PLAY TO RECENT RADICAL PARTY ACTIVITIES -- MOST OF THEM (PERHAPS TO A CONSIDERABLE DEGREE A REFLECTION OF THE CURRENT ESTABLISHED ORDER) CAST IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT. IN AN ARTICLE ENTITLED "RADICAL DISOBEDIENCE," SOMOS MAGAZINE DESCRIBED THE APRIL 22 MEETING AS "A CONVENTION -- THE FIRST ORGANIZED POLITICAL MANIFESTATION PRODUCED IN OUR COUNTRY SINCE MARCH 24, 1976." THE DOCUMENT WHICH EMERGED FROM THAT MEETING IS DESCRIBED AS A CALL FOR THE RECOMMENCEMENT OF POLITICAL AND TRADE UNION

ACTIVITY. SEVERAL JOURNALS CRITICIZE BALBIN
AND HIS PARTY FOR THEIR FAILURE TO ASSESS THE
UCRP'S OWN SINS OF THE RECENT PAST. GENTE
MAGAZINE FEATURED A LETTER TO THE EDITOR TAKING BALBIN TO
TASK FOR BEING AMBIVALENTLY SOFT WITH RESPECT
TO THE ANARCHY AND TERRORISM RAMPANT UNTIL THE
1976 COUP GENTE ALSO REPRINTED A BITING CARTOON
INTENDED TO REMIND THE PUBLIC THAT IT WAS
BALBIN WHO, BEFORE THE COUP, RESIGNEDLY THREW
UP HIS ARMS AND STATED THAT HE HAD NO SOLUTIONS

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BUENOS AIRES 3490

TO THE PROBLEMS OF THAT PERIOD.

4. RADICAL PARTY SECRETARY ENRIQUE VANOLI HAS
ACKNOWLEDGED TO EMBASSY THAT BALBIN'S STRATEGY IS
TO PRESSURE THE VIDELA GOVERNMENT INTO ACCELERATING
THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL NORMALIZATION THROUGH
PROVOCATIVE ACTIONS, SUCH AS THE APRIL 22 MEETING
AND DECLARATION, WHICH ARE INTENDED TO PUT TO A TEST
VIDELA'S PROMISE OF A POLITICAL DIALOGUE ON THE
ONE HAND AND THE BAN AGAINST PARTY ACTIVITY ON
THE OTHER. VANOLI STATES THAT, IF WHAT
VIDELA HAS UP HIS SLEEVE IS AN ARTIFICIALLY
IMPOSED PRO-GOVERNMENT UNIPARTY, BALBIN AND THE
UCRP WILL NEVER "COLLABORATE. SAYS VANOLI,
EVEN THE RADICAL PARTY GLAMOUR BOY, EX SENATOR
FERNANDO DE LA RUA, WHO UNTIL RECENTLY HAD
ENTERTAINED HOPES OF BEING INVITED TO JOIN THE
CABINET IN VIDELA'S SECOND TERM, HAS NOW SEEN
THE LIGHT AND HAS JOINED IN SIGNING THE APRIL
22 UCRP MANIFESTO; (THE MAYOR HOLD OUT WAS

CESAR GARCIA PUENTE). NOW THAT PRESIDENTIAL
AIDE JOFRE, WHO WAS A MAJOR GOVERNMENT CONTACT
MAN FOR THE POLITICAL PARTIES, APPEARS TO HAVE LEFT
THE SCENE, VANOLI STATED THAT THERE WAS NO ONE
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IN THE GOVERNMENT WHO WAS NOW TALKING TO THE
PARTIES ON A REGULAR, SYSTEM TIC BASIS. VANOLI
APPEARS QUITE PESSIMISTIC ABOUT THE PROSPECTS
FOR A REAL POLITICAL OPENING. HE BELIEVES
THAT WHATEVER PLANS FOR AN "OPENING" YOFRE MAY HAVE HAD IN MIND
HAVE NOW GONE BY THE WAYSIDE. HE FEARS THAT LAW
21,323 WILLHENCEFORTH BE RIGIDLY ENFORCED. IF
INTERIOR MINISTER HARGUINDEGUY IS RATIFIED IN HIS
JOB IN VIDELA'S SECOND CABINET ON AUGUST 1, VANOLI
SAYS THAT THE RADICAL PARTY WILL "GO INTO OP-
POSITION."

5. VANOLI SURPRISES US BY THE DEGREE OF HOSTILITY
WHICH HE HOLDS FOR VIDELA. HE REVEALED THAT BALBIN
HAS BEEN IN CONTACT WITH VIDELA'S HARDLINE CRITIC,
FIRST ARMY COMMANDER GEN. SUAREZ MASON, WHOM VANOLI
LIKES TO THINK OF AS A PARTY SYMPATHIZER.
VANOLI HOLDS THAT SUAREZ MASON HAS BEEN UNJUSTLY MALIGNED
ON ACCOUNT OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN THE FIRST
CORPS AREA, WHEREAS THE REAL CULPRIT IN VANOLI'S
EYES IS GEN. SANTIAGO OMAR RIVEROS (MILITARY
INSTITUTES COMMANDER, CAMPO DE MAYO.) VANOLI ALSO
REVEALED CONSIDERABLE SYMPATHY FOR ADMIRAL MASSERA'S
POLITICAL VIEWS, ALTHOUGH ACKNOWLEDGING THAT MASSERA
IS A CRASS OPPORTUNIST WHO CANNOT BE TRUSTED.

6. VANOLI'S COMMENTS ALSO REVEAL THAT A MAJOR PLANK
IN THE RADICAL PARTY PLATFORM IS A
CRITICISM OF ECONOMY MINISTER MARTINEZ DE HOZ
FOR HIS ALLEGED "GIVE AWAY" TO THE MULTINATIONALS, ACCOMPANIED
BY A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW REGIME OF RIGID CONTROLS ON
FOREIGN INVESTMENT -- SUGGESTING THAT THE
RADICALS' ECONOMIC PHILOSOPHY HAS NOT EVOLVED
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MUCH SINCE THE 1930S. ALL AND ALL, THE
POLITICAL PULSE OF THE NATION SEEMS TO BE
BEATING MORE RAPIDLY AND WE ARE BEGINNING
TO GET A TASTE OF THE OLD POLITICS AGAIN.
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